Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 192821

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PFOR, BL, ELAB

SUBJECT:DERIAN MEETING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

1. ON AUGUST 6 HUMAN RIGHTS COORDINATOR DERIAN MET WITH THREE MEMBERS OF BOLIVIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION, AN EX-PRESIDENT, A PRIEST, AND A SPANISH-BORN NUN. THE EX-PRESIDENT, DR. SILAS, TOLD HER THEY HAD SEEN IMPROVEMENTS IN BOLIVIA SINCE THE ADVENT OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S POLICY, E.G, POLITICAL PRISONERS WERE TREATED BETTER. HE DESCRIBED SUCH INJUSTICES AS THE SUSPENSION OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND UNIONS AND OBLIGATORY CIVIL SERVICE, NOTING THERE WAS SOME IMPROVMENT IN THE PAST TWO MONTHS. HE STRESSED THAT THE COMMISSION WAS NOT POLITICAL IN NATURE AND SAID THAT IT STROVE TO HELP PEOPLE FROM ALL KINDS OF POLITICAL BACKGROUNDS. MRS. DERIAN WAS GIVEN A LETTER WRITTEN BY RELIGIOUS WORKERS IN BOLIVIA WHICH HAD BEEN SENT TO AMBASSADOR TODMAN AND A STATEMENT PUBLISHED BY THE COMMISSION IN THAT CONFIDENTIAL

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DAYS NEWSPAPER. DR. SILAS SAID THERE WAS GREAT FEAR TO SPEAK OUT IN BOLIVIA BUT THAT THE RELIGIOUS HAD A LITTLE BETTER PROTECTION IN DOING SO.

2. MRS. DERIAN SAID SHE HAD SPOKEN WITH PRESIDENT BANZER ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS IN BOLIVIA AND HAD MENTIONED HER PLEASURE THAT THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION WERE NOT

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BEING PERSECUTED AS THEY WERE IN SOME COUNTRIES. THE PRESIDENT RESPONDED THAT HE WAS PLEASED THAT A NUMBER OF RELIGIOUS VISITED THE PRISONERS. MRS. DERIAN ADDED THAT WHEN SHE HAD VISITED BOLIVIAN PRISONS SHE HAD BEEN ASKED IF THE COMMISSION COULD ALSO VISIT. SHE SAID THE PRESIDENT AND THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR HAD BOTH EX-PRESSED EMBARASSMENT WITH THE CONDITION OF THE JAILS AND SAID THEY WOULD BE BUILDING NEW ONES. THE THREE COMMISSION MEMBERS AGREED THAT PRISON CONDITIONS WERE TERRIBLE.

3. THE CATHOLIC SISTER DESCRIBED HER WORK OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS OF VISITING POLITICAL PRISONERS. SHE DESCRIBED CRAMPED CONDITIONS AND INSTANCES OF TORTURE. SHE SAID THAT SHE HAD ALMOST BEEN DEPORTED FROM BOLIVIA BUT BECAUSE OF THE INTERVENTION OF BISHOP MESTRE WOULD BE UNABLE TO REMAIN, BUT COULD NO LONGER VISIT THE PRISONS. SHE ADMITTED THAT WHILE THE SITUATION HAS IMPROVED, IT IS STILL HORRIBLE AND SAID SHE BELIEVED INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE HELPS. SHE SAID WHILE THE SITUATION IN BOLIVIA WAS NOT AS BAD AS IN ARGENTINA OR CHILE, THE FORMS OF BRUTALITY WERE MORE SOPHISTICATED, E.G., THE PRACTICES OF EXILE ON A TOURIST VISA AND REMOVAL OF WORK PAPERS. THE CATHOLIC PRIEST ELABORATED ON THIS, NOTING THAT PROBABLY SOME 6000 BOLIVIANS WERE IN EXILE AND OTHER THOUSANDS LEFT IN THE COUNTRY WITHOUT WORKING PAPERS. CONFIDENTIAL

HE SAID REPRESSION IN BOLIVIA IS NOT DIRECTED AT ANY PARTICULAR FRACTION BUT AT ALL WHO OPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT. HE REITERATED THAT BOLIVIA, A WEAK COUNTRY, IS SUSCEPTIBLE TO U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE AND THAT BANZER'S SPEECH PLEDGING ELECTIONS WAS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS.

4. DR. SILAS DESCRIBED THE INHUMAN CONDITION OF THE MINES AND SAID THE GOVERNMENT HAS SURROUNDED ONE AREA SO THAT NEWSPAPER REPORTERS AND OTHERS CAN'T GET IN TO SEE THE CONDITIONS. IN THIS PLACE, TO WHICH HE WAS ADMITTED CLANDESTINELY, UNION LEADERS HAD BEEN EXPELLED AND SENT TO CHILE AND THEIR FAMILIES WERE REMOVED FROM COMPANY HOUSES AND LEFT TO SHIFT ON THEIR OWN WITH NO RESOURCES. HE SAID THAT THE MINERS, IN GENERAL, SUFFERED MORE THAN ANY OTHER GROUP IN BOLIVIA.

5. DR. SILAS ENDED BY SAYING THAT BECAUSE BOLIVIA IS POOR AND LACKS ORGANIZED AND FORCEFUL SPOKESMEN, THE WORLD KNOWS LITTLE OF ITS HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS. HE DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS THE ONLY POLITICAL LEADER LEFT IN

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BOLIVIA AND SAID HIS PRESENCE AT THIS MEETING HELPED THE GOVERNMENT AS IT SHOWED ITS TOLERANCE. HE SAID MOST PEOPLE FEARED TO SPEAK UP. MRS. DERIAN THANKED THE GROUP AND ASKED THEM TO MAINTAIN CONTACT THROUGH THE EMBASSY.

6. ACTION REQUESTED: PLEASE COMMENT AND ADD DESIRED DISTRIBUTION. VANCE

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